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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Reporters Sans Frontiers International - Reporters Without Borders International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[26 August 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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So far in 2015 50 news providers have been killed for trying to do their job

The United Nations system has been dealing with the issue of journalists' safety for many years and UN organs, including the Human Rights Council, have frequently recalled in their reports and resolutions that "the right to freedom of opinion and expression is a human right guaranteed to all (...) and constitutes one of the essential foundations of a democratic society" (A/RES/69/185).

Attacks and violence against journalists and media workers have been repeatedly condemned;

Member States have been repeatedly called upon to prevent violence, ensure safe and enabling environments and do what is necessary to prosecute and punish crimes perpetrated against them.

Still, there has been little progress on the ground.

RWB tallies 38 professional journalists, 4 media assistants and 8 citizen-journalists killed so far this year.

Armed conflicts

According to international humanitarian law, professional and non-professional journalists should be protected as civilians, yet they are often privileged targets because of their activity.

In **Syria** and **Iraq**, countries respectively ranked 177th and 156th out of 180 in the 2015 RWB press freedom index, media workers are publicly beheaded by the Islamic State (IS). At least seven journalists and citizen-journalists have been killed in Syria, and at least five in Iraq since January 2015. On 16 July 2015, IS executed Iraqi cameraman **Jalaa Al Abady** in Mosul after an IS court found him guilty of "leaking information" about IS to the national media.

In **Ukraine**, since the beginning of the conflict at the border with Russia, journalists have often been voluntarily targeted by both parties. At least two journalists have been killed since January 2015 while covering the conflict or because of their views on the conflict. For instance, on April 16 2015, **pro-Russian** journalist **Oles Buzina was gunned down in central Kiev.** Many other journalists have been wounded while covering the conflict. On June 14 2015, **Alexander Gayuk**, a local reporter working for *AFP*, was injured by shrapnel while Donetsk was being bombarded. A great number of journalists have also been arrested or deported by both parties to prevent them from covering the conflict.

Ukraine ranked 129 out of 180 countries in the 2015 RWB press freedom index.

Protests and demonstrations

In its resolutions 19/35 and 25/38, the Human Rights Council acknowledged that "peaceful protests can make positive contributions to the development, strengthening and effectiveness of democratic systems", calling all States "to pay particular attention to the safety of journalists and media workers covering peaceful protests, taking into account their specific role, exposure and vulnerability."

However, there too, journalists are constantly victim of threats and attacks while doing their job.

In the **United States**, journalists were arbitrarily arrested by the police or attacked by protesters during unrests. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* staff photographer **Robert Cohen** was hit in the face with pepper spray on August 10, 2015. At least two journalists were attacked or arrested by police during the Baltimore protests between April 12 and April 28 of this year.

In **Armenia**, on June 23, 2015 in Yerevan, while the authorities were using force to disperse a large crowd of demonstrators protesting against electricity price hikes, the police attacked at least 10 journalists and almost systematically confiscated or smashed their equipment. At least 11 journalists were briefly detained.

The environment
With the UN climate change conference to be held in Paris in December 2015, it is of utmost importance to take into consideration the essential role played by journalists in awareness-raising on these issues, and to consider the risks they often face while covering them.

In **India**, Sandeep Kothari, a reporter based in Madhya Pradesh who covered illegal mining, was abducted and killed on June 19. He is the second Indian journalist to be murdered while covering of such activities.

In **Russia**, **Anna Gritsevich**, a reporter for the leading news website *Kavkasky Uzel*, was imposed a three-day sentence on 6 July 2015. She was arrested while filming a protest on 29 June by about 40 residents of a village near Sochi, against what they regarded as the "illegal" dumping of rubish near a nature reserve by the Sochi municipality.

In **Italy**, **Mimmo Carrieri**, an environmentalist who reports for the online newspaper *Viv@voce*, was insulted and roughed up by around 20 campers while doing a photo-reportage on 5 July. Carrieri has often reported environmental abuses in nature reserves in the Southern Apulia region and has repeatedly been threatened. His car was set on fire and he has received threatening letters.

Religion and extremist groups
Journalists covering issues related, sometimes even very remotely, to religions, are increasingly subjected to threats or attacks.

In **Bangladesh**, at least four bloggers have been killed since January 2015, all after receiving threats from Islamist extremists related to their blogs. **Niloy Neel,** whose body was found on August 7, 2015 with his head and hands severed, was on a hit-list of bloggers that a Bangladeshi Islamist group released on 15 November 2014. Responsibility for the murders was claimed by extremist religious groups.

In **France**, in May 2015, the 17 years old editor of a school newspaper received very serious and repeated death threats after he published a special issue on 21 January in solidarity with the victims of the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre in Paris.

Corruption and criminal organisations
Journalists covering organized crime and corruption often face violence, from state actors as well as non-state organizations.

In **Brazil**, **Gleydson Carvalho**, a radio presenter who had been denouncing local political corruption for years, was shot dead on August 6 by two gunmen as he was hosting his popular programme on *Radio Liberdade 90.3 FM* in Camocim. Carvalho is the fourth journalist to be gunned down in Brazil since the start of the year.

In **India**, in June 2015, journalist Jagendra Singh, a well-known critic of the Uttar Pradesh state government, was allegedly killed by police officers because of his coverage of illegal activities by Uttar Pradesh state officials. He was set on fire by a police inspector and died of burn injuries.

Political motives
Journalists are of course often at risk from state authorities simply because they are independent voices.

In **South Soudan**, on 16 August, President Salva Kiir threatened to have journalists murdered if they "work against their country". Three days later, reporter **Peter Moi** was gunned down outside his office in the capital.

In **China**, journalist **Gao Yu**, a former Deutsche Welle correspondent, is being arbitrarily held since May 2014. Despite her declining health, she is subjected to almost daily interrogations. In June 2015, **Yang Dongying** was also arbitrarily arrested, because of her work for 64Tianwang, a news website run by the cyber-dissident Huang Qi and charged with "picking a quarrel and making trouble" because she criticized Zhejiang police's actions in extracting a confession from her 13-year-old son, who has since been hospitalized.

In **Azerbaïdjan**, the family of **Ganimat Zahid**, the well-known editor of the opposition newspaper *Azadliq* currently living in exile, is being constantly harassed by the authorities. His 87 year-old mother is under close surveillance, his nephew and his cousin have been arbitrarily arrested in July, and another nephew is facing 5 to 12 years in prison on a drug possession charge.

In **Iran**, the Washington Post's Tehran correspondent **Jason Rezaian** has been detained since July 2014 and held in isolation in Tehran's Evin prison. He has been subjected to mistreatment to extract a confession for He is accused of "activities against Iran's security in collaboration with a foreign organization or government" and "anti-government propaganda."

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the UN HRC

- Urge member-states, in particular those who are members of the UN security council, to take all necessary action in order to have the situation in Syria and Iraq in which war crimes against journalists have been committed referred to the International Criminal Court

- Regarding armed conflicts in general, collaborate with all relevant UN bodies to establish a Special representative of the UN Secretary general to monitor compliance by member-states' of their obligations under international law.

- Undertake an assessment of the special risks faced by journalists covering environmental issues.

- Consider the creation by the HRC Special procedures of an 'Online rapid reaction platform' to channel accurate information on the risks faced by journalists to the relevant international human rights bodies, similar to the initiative proposed by RWB to the Council of Europe.

To Member-States

- Put an end to the targeting of journalists both in armed conflicts and during demonstrations
- Adopt effective measures to combat the impunity of crimes against journalists
- Support the establishment of the mandate of a Special representative of the UN Secretary general as described above.
- Collaborate in the creation of an 'Online rapid reaction platform' as described above